

SOCIAL & ETHICAL ISSUES GROUP

STIRLING'S NEW SCOTS

ISIS, Hostages, The Regime, Barrel bombs, Beheadings.

These words used to dominate our news until eclipsed by coronavirus. The United Nations, swamped by the exodus from Syria into their camps, appealed to the international community to take in some 'vulnerable' Syrian refugees. In 2015 the UK Government decided to help, provided that local authorities volunteered to resettle them. That last link appeared to be the weak one. Stirling was apparently not for stepping up. Four Stirling friends met to think about what they could do.

Gaining Council support

A petition seemed one way, but how? Happily, SBC's Family Life Centre were hosting REFRESH Seminars and the REFRESH organiser was one of that 'gang of four'. A seminar was arranged to launch the petition and the snappy name 'Stirling Citizens for Sanctuary' (SCfS) was invented for publicity. It was the biggest seminar ever and people took petitions away to their churches, clubs and friends. Over 600 signatures were gathered in a few days and the petition was presented to Stirling Council, gaining cross-party support. Soon, Clackmannanshire Council followed and asked SCfS for help so SCfS renamed itself 'Forth Valley Welcome' (FVW).

Five years on, between Stirling and Clackmannanshire Councils, there are about 40 families with about 80 children, mostly from Syria but, recently, some from the Sudans. The Councils provide Government-funded basics while FVW volunteers welcome and support the new arrivals as they settle in: arranging additional language learning activities such as 'Snack & Chat', 'Conversation Cafés' and 'Walk & Talk'; allocating befrienders to each family; helping people with medical appointments; enabling 'digital inclusion' by providing laptops and technical support where required... to mention a few.

Success recognised

FVW has seven trustees and employs two part-time staff to coordinate almost eighty volunteers drawn from



Donald Black writes about how Forth Valley Welcome was set up and how this award-winning charity has provided vital help to refugees settling in the Stirling area.

across the community. It received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2020 and in the previous year one of our teams was named Team of the Year and one of our trustees Trustee of the Year by Clackmannanshire's Third Sector Interface.

Our New Scots have settled amazingly well. At school, some of the children are prizewinners. Predictably, most of the men can drive but, significantly, several of the women have learned to drive too, with FVW help. Several volunteer (eg at the food bank), some have found employment and others have started their own businesses.

In the future, both Councils expect to continue to engage with the Vulnerable Refugee Scheme, so there will be an ongoing need for FVW support as before. However, under the scheme, refugees have only limited leave to remain – limited to 5 years - after which they must apply for indefinite leave to remain. Is success a foregone conclusion? Hopefully, but the Windrush generation thought they were secure, so who knows? FVW with its networks may be needed here too.

Continued overleaf

Stirling's New Scots (cont'd)

How one family has been helped

The Hilal family were among the first to arrive in Stirling and are known to us in SBC. Yehya Hilal sent us this message:

"Hi there. My name is Yehya I have been here 5 years with my family, when we arrived here we couldn't speak English at all we were worried how we are going to communicate and how we will adopt new system and when we met nice people here we felt like home. I am working and my kids doing well in school and speak fluent English. Me and my family would like to say big thanks to lovely neighbours and Scottish government and people around us, And many thanks to charity forth valley welcome for lots of help for refugees about language and much support. Kind regards Hilal family"

More information at www.forthvalleywelcome.org

HOW DOES CHANGE HAPPEN?

The JPIT (Joint Public Issues Team, a collaboration of Baptists and other denominations) have produced a helpful, and very practical, small group resource called 'How does change happen?' which encourages us to consider the role of Christians in being agents of change in society.

Six sessions in length with everything you need to run the course, it should provide stimulating discussion and challenge for any home group. You can find it [here](#).

JPIT also have a regular podcast in which Christians involved in politics at a variety of levels and in differing contexts explore how their Christian faith influences their approach to politics. There is a wide range of political views expressed and it is helpful to hear from those who may have different political opinions from our own. Find the link [here](#).



OPENING SCOTLAND'S CHURCHES

A group of 27 Scottish church leaders has been granted a judicial review over the closure of churches as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions.

The group is challenging 'legislation forcing the closure of churches in Scotland and criminalising public worship'.

Court of Session Judge Lord Braid agreed to a 'substantive hearing' on 11 and 12 March. If successful, it could see the Scottish Government directed to allow churches to re-open.

Rev Willie Philip of The Tron Church in Glasgow is one of the members of the group, and he explains [here](#) why they are putting forward this legal challenge.



Source: Church Times

HATE CRIME BILL UPDATE

The Hate Crime and Public Order Bill (Scotland) continues its passage through the Scottish Parliament and still faces opposition from MSPs and others to some of its proposals.

Particular concern has been expressed that the Justice Secretary has back-tracked on previous commitments to allow free expression around the issues of sexual orientation and transgender identity.

An impasse is developing between the Justice Committee who are examining the bill and the Justice Secretary Humza Yousaf.

It is planned that the bill should become law before this session of Parliament concludes ahead of the election in May.